

CORONAVIRUS

California activates 'mass fatality' program as Covid cases and deaths climb

"This is a deadly disease, a deadly pandemic and we're in the middle of it right now," Gov. Gavin Newsom said.



— ER tech Brenda de la Cruz and RN Janet Hays work outside St Mary Medical Center as they handle the overflow at the 200 bed hospital in Apple Valley, Calif. on Dec. 8, 2020. Mike Blake / Reuters

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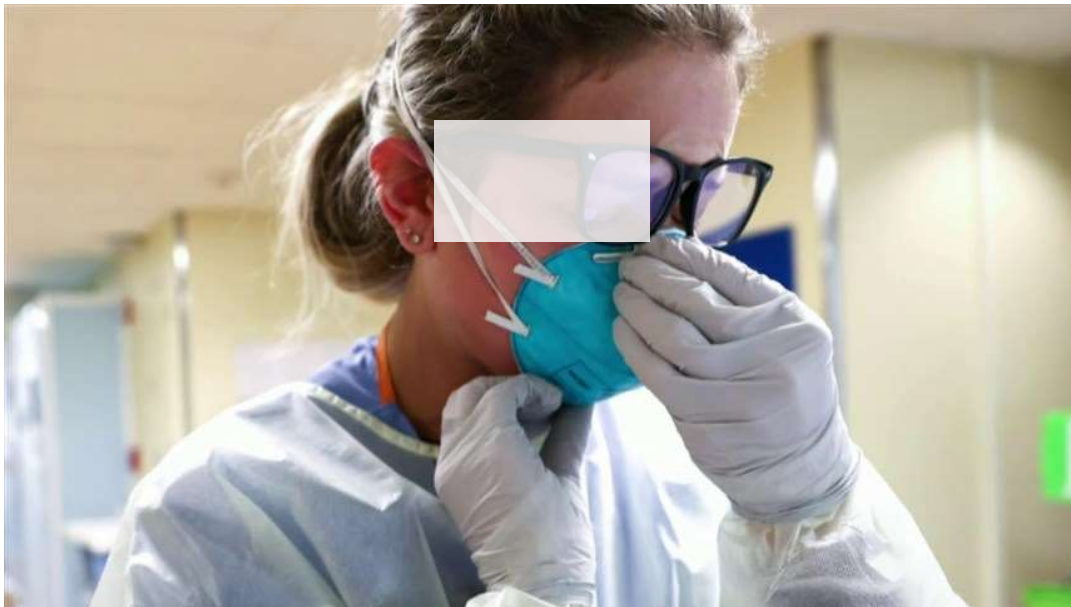
By Minyonne Burke

California activated its "mass fatality" program as coronavirus cases and deaths continue to rise, leading to the state [purchasing thousands of extra body bags](#).

Gov. Gavin Newsom said during a [news conference](#) Tuesday that he was activating the program in response to "sobering" Covid-19 data.

"This is a deadly disease, a deadly pandemic and we're in the middle of it right now," he said. "We're near the end, but we're in the middle of the most acute peak as it relates to what we refer to as the third wave."

Southern California ICU capacity at zero as U.S. Covid cases rise



"Think about if we continue on the path that we're on what that January 14th number may look like if we do not do what we need to do," he said.

About 32,300 new cases of the virus are reported in the state each day, a number Newsom said was historic. The positivity rate climbed from 6.9 percent at the beginning of December to more than 10 percent as of Monday.

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To handle the spike, the state ordered 5,000 body bags and 60 refrigerated units that "are currently standing by in counties and at hospitals," Newsom said. He said that although vaccines are beginning to arrive, the coronavirus crisis is far from over.

"There is light at the end of the tunnel, but we're still in the tunnel," he said. "And that means we're going through perhaps the most intense and urgent moment since the beginning of this pandemic."

To date, California has had over 1.7 million confirmed Covid-19 cases and more than 21,000 deaths, according to [the state's health department](#).

More than 17 million cases have been confirmed in the United States as of Thursday and over 300,000 people have died, [according to NBC News' count](#).



Minyvonne Burke



Minyvonne Burke is a breaking news reporter for NBC News.

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